

State Testimony SB2012

My name is Trisha Cole. I am the PreK teacher at Park River Area School. I am in support of SB2012 and the continued funding of the Best in Class Grant in North Dakota. We are in year two of receiving this grant. Best in Class dollars have positively impacted our community, our school district and most importantly our youngest students and their families.

This grant has allowed us to update our preschool environment. We have been able to create a space that is not only developmentally appropriate, but one that fosters exploration, learning, and that is safe and accessible for all that attend. Best in Class dollars have opened the door for students to explore, learn, play, create, and grow socially. This grant has enabled our school district to provide furniture, toys, art supplies, math manipulatives, microscopes, curriculum, books, musical instruments, and so much more that would never have been possible with district funds alone.

The family engagement component has helped create a scaffold to support students and their families. It has helped to build positive relationships between parents, teachers and our community. It provides parents with practical guidance so they can continue to help their child learn and grow. This in turn helps our students with making connections, developing language and vocabulary, and managing emotions. For many parents, this is the first interaction they have with our school. Building positive relationships between home and school will impact our preschoolers as they transition to kindergarten and beyond.

Although we have only participated with Best in Class for a year and a half, our winter test scores have shown noticeable gains when comparing data from 2017 to present. Specifically, we saw significant upward trends in phonological awareness, oral language and vocabulary. Our year-end composite scores in 2022 for the PELI (Preschool Early Learning Indicators, an assessment designed to measure pre-literacy and oral language skills) reflected the highest test scores since 2017 with the majority of children testing above benchmark and no children testing below the average range. There is no way of knowing the full impact BIC has had at this point. We hope to continue to measure achievements and to see these upward trends continue.

I have been an educator for 28 years. I have taught PreK for 14 years. I am here to tell you this makes a difference. As teachers, we do our best with what we have. We sometimes don't allow ourselves to dream of what an impact having the best tools for the job could have on our students. This grant has allowed Park River Area School to build a preschool program that meets everyone's needs. It has allowed us to create an environment that fosters learning, exploration, creativity, and inclusiveness. Everyone is welcome and families feel supported. The professional development opportunities have helped me grow as an educator. I am going to leave you with one story from a student I had last year.

When you get the Best in Class grant, one of the first things you have to do is an assessment/inventory of what you currently have. When I did this, it was determined that I

needed more resources in my classroom that represented different cultures and diversity. I had never considered this a top priority and I hadn't given much thought to how this could impact my students. I ordered people for the dollhouse that represented different cultures, ages, and disabilities. I ordered many new books for our class library that represented different cultures. New dolls were added to the dramatic play center. I added new Lego people to our Lego table. The Lego people represented different ages, cultures, and occupations. The new Lego people quickly became a favorite of many of my students. They fostered opportunities for play that included vocabulary and language that I had not observed. It brought many more girls to the Lego table than previously observed. One child in particular came to me one morning with tears in her eyes and gave me a huge hug. When I asked her what was wrong she replied, "Thank you Mrs. Cole, for finding Lego people that look just like me!" Her mother was from the Philippines. This interaction highlights how important it is to be mindful and diligent about the environment we provide and its effects on how included and accepted others feel. The BIC programming and funding guides and supports us in making profound impacts towards engaging children in the learning environment and promoting the success for all students.

This grant is making a difference at Park River Area School. I sincerely hope that you will continue to support Best in Class for North Dakota.

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